

# Hidden Sydney's little laneways History Walk

CITY OF SYDNEY





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Sydney was settled around a freshwater stream that formed the back boundary of properties fronting the earliest main streets, and a series of informal paths provided rear access to gardens, stables and storage areas. In time these laneways became formalised, oblivious to any planner's grid. Other laneways developed to provide access to the rear of commercial buildings that came to dominate the area. Charming walkways or grungy service lanes, today they contribute complexity to the tapestry of the city.



Allow one to 2 hours for this walk.  
Start at **Phillip Lane (1)**.

1

## Phillip Lane



Phillip Lane in 1930 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

This is the last survivor of several laneways established by the 1840s to service houses on Macquarie Street. The white Astor apartments on the left were built in 1923, an early example of fashionable apartment living in the city. On the right is the rear of the Chief Secretary's Building, occupied from 1878. The laneway's low sandstone archway, remnant sandstone guttering and cobblestone paving echo a past kind of streetscape that has all but disappeared from the city.



Beyond the laneway across Phillip Street is the Museum of Sydney. If you have time, take a look inside, but to continue the walk, pass the museum, cross Bridge Street, head down the left side of Young Street and turn left into **Customs House Lane (2)**. Before Circular Quay was built in the 1830s this area was waterfront property, still retaining some mangrove vegetation and dotted with early boat building sheds. Hence the odd shaped blocks, unaligned streets and little lanes.

2

## Customs House Lane



View of one of Hinchcliff's former woolstores before construction of the second identical adjoining woolstore, c1880 (Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Hinchcliff's Woolstore, on the south-east corner, was built in two stages between 1864 and 1881, and is a rare survivor from the time when Circular Quay was a centre for international shipping and wool was Australia's greatest export. Imagine the bales being raised on the hoist pulleys that are still attached to the building. In the second half of the 20th century the building was set up with dormitories and a soup kitchen and used as the Matthew Talbot Hostel for unemployed men. Inside Customs House you can take a look at the in-floor city model, catch an exhibition, have a coffee or borrow a book from the City of Sydney Library.



Half way along Customs House Lane, turn left into **Loftus Lane (3)** and follow the dog-leg through to Loftus Street. You are now facing **Macquarie Place (4)**.

3

## Loftus Lane

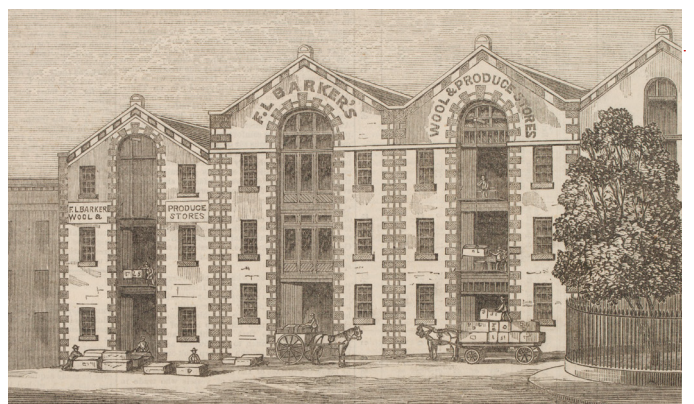


Illustration: The former F L Barker woolstores, part of which is now the Gallipoli Club, *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 16 September 1876

For most of its life this laneway has served as a back entrance to the buildings on Loftus Street, housing customs agents, shipping brokers and wool buyers. The sandstone 3-storey building on the right, which forms the rear of the Gallipoli Club, was built in 1876. This and Hinchcliff's are the only remaining woolstores in the Circular Quay precinct.



4

## Macquarie Place



Men's convenience in Macquarie Place  
(Photograph: Paul Patterson, City of Sydney)

There was once a through street at Macquarie Place, but this is now given over to public space joining a little park packed with items of historical interest, including the Obelisk of Distances, the anchor of the First Fleet ship *Sirius*, a Victorian drinking fountain and the remnants of what was once a glass-domed entrance to an underground 'men's convenience'. This area is a popular drinking hole at the end of the day when the surrounding office blocks close for business.



As you pass the 'men's convenience' in **Macquarie Place (4)** walk along **Reiby Place (5)**, before making your way to **Bulletin Place (6)**.

5

## Reiby Place



Mary Reiby, c1835 (Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Today Reiby Place is lined with slick glass and concrete, but its name commemorates one of the city's earliest entrepreneurs. Before this area was drained, Thomas and Mary Reiby had a house in waterfront Macquarie Place. Mary Reiby, convicted for horse stealing, became a wealthy and respected widow. In 1817 her house became the premises of Australia's first bank, the Bank of New South Wales. Reiby's face is on the \$20 note. The Gateway building offers a range of food options.

6

## Bulletin Place



Bulletin Place, 1937, viewed from Pitt Street  
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Basement has long been a favourite jazz venue in the city. Beyond this, warehouses and stores from the mid 19th century preserve a little enclave of 'olde Sydney'. *The Bulletin* newspaper was published here from 1880 and writers such as Henry Lawson and AB 'Banjo' Paterson would have frequented this little street. This lane possibly inspired the lines in Paterson's famous poem 'Clancy of the Overflow' about dingy offices and folk with 'stunted forms and weedy, for townfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste'. Prove him wrong by spending a little time here enjoying a meal or a cup of coffee.



When you arrive on Pitt Street, cross over to the western side and into dog-legged **Underwood Street (7)**. Follow it down to **Dalley Street (8)**.

7

## Underwood Street



Looking west along Underwood Street, c1960  
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Here is another reminder of how remote the original waterfront has become, as this is the place where James Underwood built Sydney's first commercial shipyard in 1798. The *Sydney Gazette* celebrated the day the 'first vessel lain down in the colony', named *The Contest*, was launched at Underwood's yard in 1804.



## Dalley Street

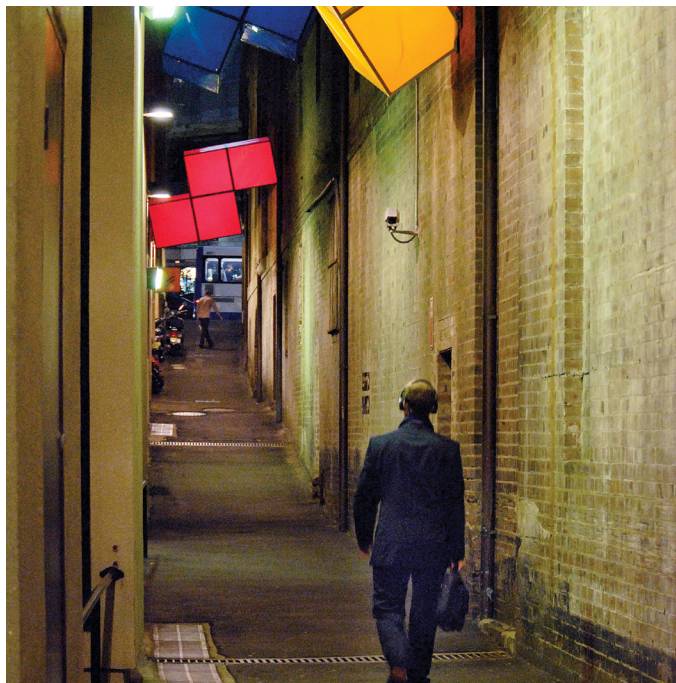


Queens Court, off Queens Place (Dalley Street), 1875  
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

What's in a name? Dalley Street, named for politician Victor Dalley, was once called Queen's Place. And its continuation across George Street was called Charlotte Place (now Grosvenor Street). Queen Charlotte was George III's queen. Queen's Court (Dalley Street) was part of a warren of tiny lanes and courtyards that formed up along the banks of the Tank Stream between the 'official' George and Pitt streets.

Turn right at **Dalley Street (8)** and follow it to George Street. Ahead, across the road, is the Brooklyn Hotel and Johnsons Corner, landmarks in Sydney since 1912. If you're not in need of a drink, turn left and walk up George Street. Before crossing over Bridge Street, notice the Metropolitan Hotel, a match for the Brooklyn, and the solid Burns Philp and Co building, one of Sydney's old shipping firms. Turn left into **Abercrombie Lane (9)**.

## Abercrombie Lane



Abercrombie Lane featuring an art installation, 'One more go one more go' in 2008 (Photograph: Paul Patterson, City of Sydney)

On the corner of Abercrombie Lane is the George Patterson Building, refurbished as an upmarket bar after a fire gutted the building in 1996. This building retains many original features, including some atmospheric fire-damaged walls. Walking down Abercrombie Lane it is easy to imagine that you are heading for the Tank Stream.

"The spot chosen for the settlement was at the head of a cove, near the run of fresh water which stole silently along through a very thick wood, the stillness of which had then, for the first time since the Creation, been interrupted."

(David Collins, *Account of the English Colony of New South Wales*, 1802)

When the water supply became inadequate, convicts were set to work digging holding tanks into the watercourse, and so it became known as the Tank Stream. Today the stream runs silently through a city drain below the pavement.



Just before you reach Pitt Street, turn left into **Tank Stream Way (10)** and left again into **Bridge Lane (11)**. Either of these lanes will take you back to Bridge Street.

## Tank Stream Way and Bridge Lane



Tank Stream Way (left) in the foreground and Bridge Lane (right)  
(Photograph: Paul Patterson, City of Sydney)

Tank Stream Way was once part of Hamilton Street which ran from Bridge to Hunter streets, named after Hamilton's biscuit factory. Most of it disappeared under the Australia Square development, leaving 2 remnant laneways, and this section was renamed in 1981. In Bridge Lane, once the site of the town's first lumber yards, look for the old warehouse doorway, now entrance to the Establishment Hotel. As late as the 1860s there was still vacant land sliced between small cottages in this area, but by the end of the 19th century it had become a favoured location for warehouses, including several tea merchants' stores.



Turn right at Bridge Street and then right onto Pitt Street. Stop on the corner of **Pitt and Bond Street (12)** and take a look down the street.



12

## Bond Street



Bond Street, looking east, in the 1880s  
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Bond Street remains on the grid, but most of its buildings were swept away for the construction of Australia Square, which opened in 1967. In the early decades of the 20th century, Bond Street was a honeycomb of small shops and businesses, including printers and publishers. The influential magazine *Art in Australia* was published from here and Bond Street studios attracted tenants such as artist, Sydney Ure Smith and photographer, Max Dupain.

Continue along Pitt Street and turn right to walk along **Curtin Place (13)** towards George Street.

13

## Curtin Place



Curtin Place, formerly Little George Street, April 1902  
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

This lane, formerly Little George Street, forms the southern boundary of the Australia Square site. John Curtin was Australian Prime Minister in 1941–45. Between this and Bond Street, underneath the skyscraper, was once the romantically named Robin Hood Place. Two other little lanes, Hamilton Street and Little Hunter Street run off Curtin Place.



At George Street, cross over to Margaret Street, then turn left again into **Wynyard Lane (14)**.

14

## Wynyard Lane



Imperial Hotel, Wynyard Lane, 1919 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Up until the 1840s, this area was taken up with military barracks. When the barracks closed the military commander, Edward Buckley Wynyard, ensured his name was applied generously to places in this precinct, which today features loading docks, carparks and the back end of city businesses.



At the end of **Wynyard Lane (14)** is Wynyard Street and Regimental Square. Notice the fine bank building ahead and the equally fine piles to your left on George Street. This is the heartland of 19th century commercial Sydney. Turn right, walk up Wynyard Street and cross over the top of Wynyard Park to York Street.

Walk along the park side of York Street and notice across the road the distinctive Art Deco Transport House with its green tiled façade. Walk through this building (entrance to Wynyard railway station) to **York Lane (15)**. Turn left and follow it to the end. You will cross Erskine Street and arrive at Barrack Street.



15

## York Lane



York Lane, 1938 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

This is Sydney's longest laneway. Just before Barrack Street there are some remnants of old warehouses on the right, and on the left some residential apartments. Residents here were some of the early adopters of the current trend towards inner city living that began in the 1980s.



Barrack Street offers opportunities to fuel up with food, with choices ranging from street stalls to the elegant banking chamber of the old Savings Bank of NSW. Turn left and return to George Street. Cross over and walk north until you reach Palings Lane.

16 and 17

## Palings Lane and Ash Street

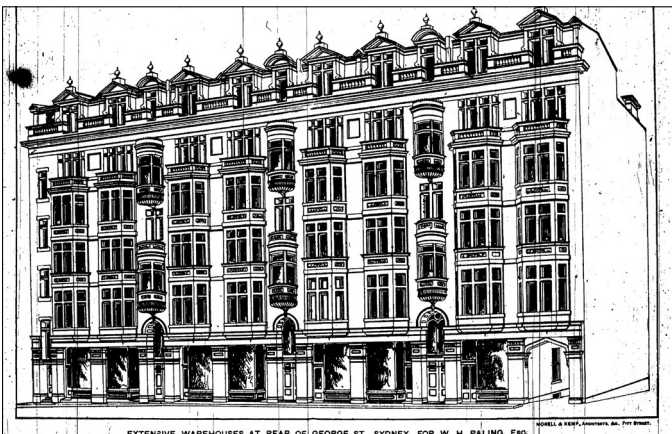


Illustration: *Australian Builder & Contractor's News*, 8 December, 1888

The elegant complex of up-market restaurants, pools, bars and spas on George Street is entered through narrow Palings Lane, which despite its very contemporary feeling, has been on or close to here for a long time. It was named because it led through to the large 1880s Palings Building in Ash Street. WH Paling was a musical entrepreneur who imported and eventually manufactured pianos and sheet music. Upper floor rooms in Palings building, and many others in this area were rented out to teachers of music and dance, and as artists' studios. Ash Street also housed the headquarters of the Liberal Party of Australia for many years.



When you reach the end of Ash Street you have arrived at Angel Place.

18

## Angel Place



Interior of City Recital Hall (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

In front of you, at the intersection of Ash Street and Angel Place is a covered way that goes through to Martin Place, Sydney's grandest street. Turn right and face towards George Street. On either side are rough hewn trachyte stone façades of 2 fine commercial buildings. The one on the right was built in 1896, the other in 1904, both designed by American immigrant, Edward Raht, who introduced this neo-Romanesque style to Sydney. Look up and catch a glimpse of Sydney's little white Eiffel Tower, the AWA Tower, in the distance. Now turn and walk back to Pitt Street past the City Recital Hall, definitely a hidden city gem. The Edwardian-style Angel Hotel on the corner of Pitt Street shows off period timber fittings, stained glass and turquoise tiles.



At Pitt Street, cross over and walk down **Penfold Place (19)** and **Hosking Place (20)**.



## Penfold Place and Hosking Place



Hosking Place, 1967 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The Sydney printing and stationery company, W C Penfold and Co, had origins on Pitt Street dating back to the 1830s. In 1912 the firm bought the 8-storey Hosking House in Hosking Lane for an expanded print works. These private laneways served the firm for generations, and acted as a convenient shortcut for locals. John Hosking was Sydney's first elected Lord Mayor. He had to step down from this position when he was declared bankrupt in the 1840s depression. If only he could see this piece of real estate now!

**Retrace your steps to Pitt Street turn left towards Martin Place. You may wish to call in at the GPO to see the Tank Stream artefacts (21). Finish your tour at Rowe Street (22).**

## Tank Stream



Frederick Garling's 1842 watercolour shows the Tank Stream emptying to Sydney Cove (Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

If you enter the GPO building at No. 1 Martin Place directly under the clock tower and head downstairs, you will find eating and shopping temptations as well as an exhibition of objects found in an archaeological dig on this site. They include an excavated segment of the original drain which channels the Tank Stream.

## Rowe Street



Notanda Gallery, Roycroft Bookshop and Henriette Lamotte's hat boutique, Rowe Street, c1950 (Photograph: Kerry Dundas, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

No street in Sydney has had more words written about it than Rowe Street. By the early 20th century its fine run of terrace houses was converted to small shops and galleries, and Rowe Street was the closest thing Sydney had to European chic. Upstairs rooms were used as artists' studios, and the commercial Notanda Gallery was a gathering place for the artistic community. In adjoining shops you could borrow a book or buy an elegant hat. Many people remember window shopping for the latest in interior design and Parisian frocks, buying some music at Rowe Street Records or enjoying a bohemian espresso at Horton's Gallerie. The street remains, but the buildings were demolished to make way for the construction of the MLC Centre in the 1970s. Many people still mourn its passing, and it continues to be cited as a cautionary tale against overdevelopment and wholesale.



Your walk ends here.







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